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ABSTRACT

Personal and academic characteristics of students at public and private historically black colleges were compared, and predictors of academic progression of these students were identified. Progression for individual students was defined as the average number of credit hours completed per semester. Compared to private college students, students at public black colleges were more likely to be married and work while attending college, and were more likely to receive scholarships and grants. Black private college students were more likely than black public college students to have degree aspirations beyond the baccalaureate degree and to come from families with higher socioeconomic status (SES). In both sectors, students who progressed faster were younger and had higher grade point averages (GPAs). While high school GPA, student satisfaction, and academic integration were significantly related to academic progression at black public but not private colleges, SES of students was related to progression at private black colleges but not at public black colleges. Since the regression model predicted progression better at public than private colleges, future research should include additional background and academic factors. (SW)

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ACADEMIC PROGRESSION OF STUDENTS AT PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES

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This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the San Diego Hilton in San Diego, California, February 14-17, 1987. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

Academic Progression of Students at Public and Private Historically Black Colleges

During the past twenty years, the number of black students enrolled in institutions of higher education in this country has increased significantly. Colleges and universities which had previously denied admission to blacks are at present actively recruiting these students. Before 1964, the majority of black college students were enrolled at black colleges, compared to about one-fifth of black students in the fall of 1980[1]. Desegregation legislation has altered the student population of many American colleges and universities. As a result of eliminating legal racial barriers to higher education more blacks enrolled in college during the 1960's and 1970's and were provided with more alternative types of colleges to attend.

Although the effects of desegregation legislation have been more pronounced at public black colleges, all historically black colleges have been impacted by black students' expanded opportunities in higher education. Due to these expanded opportunities, the historical black college is no longer the primary type of college environment black students select. However, black colleges continue to be the educational environment preferred by many students. Traditionally, black colleges have been thought to represent a monolithic group of

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[1] Antonio Garibaldi, ed. **Black colleges and Universities: Challenges for the Future** (New York: Praeger, 1984).

institutions of higher learning. Legal measures, historical factors, and contemporary trends have produced measurable differences among historically black colleges and their student populations. This paper examines students attending historically black public and black private four-year colleges and examines differences between these two groups with specific attention given to the predictors of students' academic progression.

Most of the historically black colleges are located in the southern part of the United States. These institutions were initially founded for educating black people who lived under numerous social, political, and legal restrictions in this country. The typical historically black college has a small student population. Of the one hundred-five historically black colleges, eighty-four of these schools enroll less than 3,000 students and forty-one of them have enrollments less than 1,000. The average enrollments are not very different from those of most private colleges in this country. The remaining twenty-one black colleges are somewhat larger, with a few institutions having enrollment larger than 10,000 students. It must be noted that size varies across type of black college. Most noticeable is that state-supported black colleges tend to have larger student populations than black private colleges.

The majority of students attending historically black institutions are black. Black colleges enroll about one-fifth of the more than one million black students in institutions of higher education in the United States. The student population

served by historically black institutions has changed in recent years. Of particular interest is the increasing number of white students who are currently attending these colleges. A study by Brazziel and Brazziel[2] indicates that while black student enrollment in the past few years at historically black four-year institutions declined by approximately 5,000 students, white student enrollment has increased to about ten percent. Approximately 4,500 white students are presently attending these black institutions. Increases in white student enrollment have been primarily experienced by black public colleges due to desegregation legislation aimed at state supported institutions. Also, differences in the socioeconomic status of students at public and private institutions are to be considered. Feldman and Newcomb[3] found that a person's socioeconomic status influences the decision of attending a public or private college. Since the difference in the expenses of attending a private college versus a public one is also present among black colleges, a student's socioeconomic status is expected to be positively associated with attending a private black college.

Another difference emerging between black public and black private institutions is the rate students are progressing through

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[2]W. F. Brazziel and M. E. Brazziel, **Recent College and University Enrollment Patterns of Black Students in States Affected By Adams-Califano Litigation**. (Atlanta: Southern Education Foundation, 1981).

[3]K.A. Feldman and T.M. Newcomb, **The Impact of College on Students** (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969).

their college careers. According to Nettles and his associates[4], students at historically black private institutions have faster progression rates than their peers at black public colleges. Given this significant difference in progression rates, little information is available about factors which may explain and predict differential rates of progression for students at black public and private colleges. It is important to identify student characteristics which affect their academic progression. Identifying differences in predictors for black public and private college students progression will guide administrators of these institutions toward possible program and policy initiatives which address the issue of academic progression.

Similar to the studies of Allen[5], Gosman et al.[6], Fleming[7], and Ayers[8], much of the recent research on students at black

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[4]Michael Nettles, Erica Gosman, A. Robert Thoeny, and Betty Dandridge, **The Causes and Consequences of College Student Performance: A Focus on Black And White Students' Attrition Rates, Progression Rates, and Grade Point Averages** (A Report by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 1985).

[5]Walter Allen, **Gender and Campus Race Differences in Black Student Academic Performance, Racial Attitudes, and College Satisfaction** (Southern Education Foundation Higher Education Series, 1986).

[6]Erica Gosman, Betty Dandridge, Michael Nettles, and A. Robert Thoeny, "Predicting Student Progression: The Influence of Race and Other Student and Institutional Characteristics on College Student Performance" **Research in Higher Education**, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1983.

[7]Jacqueline Fleming, **Blacks in College** (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1984).

[8]William Q. Ayers, "Student Achievement at Predominantly White and Predominantly Black Universities", **American Educational Research Journal**, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1983.

institutions of higher education has been focused on the differences in the experience of students who attend predominantly black colleges compared to those attending predominantly white colleges. In terms of academic progression, Astin[9] and Nettles el al.[10] suggest that attending a predominantly black college appears to reduce a students' chances of persisting to the baccalaureate degree. Black colleges have historically been characterized as having educationally and socioeconomically poorer students when compared to predominantly white institutions. In addition, Thomas[11] and Ramist's[12] studies of college students by race have shown that black students are more likely to withdraw from college than white students. Cross and Astin[13], McPartland[14], and Thomas[15] found that black students

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[9]Alexander Astin, **Minorities in Higher Education** (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1984).

[10]Ibid

[11]Gail Thomas, **The Impact of Schooling and Student Characteristics on the Four-Year Graduation of Race and Sex Groups** (Baltimore: Center for Social Organization of Schools, 1980).

[12]L. Ramist, **College Student Attrition and Retention** (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1981).

[13]Patricia Cross and Helen Astin, "Factors Affecting Black Students' Persistence in College". In G.E. Thomas (Ed.), **Black Students in Higher Education: Conditions and Experiences in the 1970's** (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981).

[14]James McPartland, "Desegregation and equity in higher education and employment: Is progress related to the desegregation of elementary and secondary schools?", **Law and Contemporary Problems**, vol. 42, 1978.

generally progress through college at slower rates than white students. This research has been important in investigating the comparative college experience of black and white students. However, these studies not do focus on the variation and comparison of students within black institutions. Most of this research has not paid close enough attention to possible effects of the type of black college attended on college experiences, specifically academic progression.

STUDY PROCEDURES

The analyses in this paper are based upon survey responses of 468 full-time students attending twelve historically black colleges and universities located in ten southern and mid-atlantic states. Six of the black colleges are public institutions and six are private.

The data used in this study were collected from a random stratified sample of college students in the fall of 1982. The original student sample from which the sample for this paper is drawn was designed to randomly select 300 students from the sophomore, junior and senior classes on each campus for a total of 900. Fifty white and fifty black students were to be selected from each class. The sample for this paper includes only full-time students at black colleges. The number of students from

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[15]Gail Thomas, **Student and Institutional Characteristics as Determinants of the Prompt and Subsequent Four-Year College Graduation of Race and Sex Groups** (Baltimore: Center for Social Organization of Schools, 1981).

each type of black institution is 312 for public and 156 for private colleges.

Each student respondent in the sample received the "Student Opinion Survey" (SOS) instrument which was developed to collect data concerning personal, academic, demographic, and attitudinal information of college students. The SOS was designed specifically for a study entitled "The Causes and Consequences of College Students' Performance: A Focus on Black and White Students' Attrition Rates, Progression Rates, and Grade Point Averages" (Nettles et. al., 1985). Several instruments were used as references in the development of the Student Opinion Survey. Instruments used in its development included the Student Descriptive Questionnaire administered by the College Board during the SAT, the Educational Testing Services' college and University Environmental Scale (CUESII), and the Higher Education Evaluation Kit of the Center for the Study of Evaluation at the University of California, Los Angeles. The SOS consists of 109 questions about students' background and opinions about various aspects of the college they attend.

METHODOLOGY

The analyses in this paper are guided by the following objectives: (1) to compare personal and academic background characteristics of students at two types of black colleges, and (2) to identify significant characteristics which predict the academic progression of these students. Chi-square analysis is

used to make comparisons of categorical variables of black public and private college students. Analysis of Variance is used to compare students on interval variables. Finally, Pearson Product Moment Correlations are used to describe the relationship between student interval level variables and student progression rate, while multiple regression analyses are performed to identify significant predictor variables of black college students' progression rate.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

The dependent variable in this study is college student academic progression rate. A student's progression rate is defined at the individual level as the average number of credit hours completed per semester. This information was self-reported on the SOS when students were asked when they first enrolled at their present institution and how many credit hours they had earned since that time. College academic progression rate is computed by diving the number of semester credit hours completed by the number of semesters the student has been enrolled at their current school. For students at colleges not on a semester calendar, the number of credit hours earned was converted into semester hours based on conversion factors provided by the student's institution.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

This study uses twelve independent variables in the regression equation. These variables represent student's

personal and academic characteristics which may predict students' progression throughout their college career. Academic characteristics such as college grade point average, Scholastic Aptitude Test score (SAT), study habits, and academic integration are identified as independent variables. Age, gender, socioeconomic status (SES), student satisfaction, degree aspiration, work status, and having educational grants or scholarships are student background characteristics that are also used as independent variables. Four of the independent variables are factor scores; student satisfaction, study habits, academic integration, and socioeconomic status. The items included in each of these factors are shown in Appendix A.

FINDINGS

The Chi-square test of independence illustrated in Table 1 is used to show differences in black public and private college students on various categorical variables. Table 1 shows that students who attend black public colleges compared to black private colleges are significantly different in terms of gender representation, marital status, student work status, whether they receive educational grants, and degree aspirations. Students attending black public colleges are more likely to be married and work while attending college. 15.6% of students at black public colleges are married compared to 4.3% of student at black private institutions. Also, there are more students attending black public colleges who work at least part time than at black private

schools. Black private college students are more likely to be female (72.8% compared to 58.0%). In terms of scholarships and grants received for educational expenses, black public college students are more likely to get this type of financial aid (67.7%) compared to 48.2% of black private college students. Table 1 also indicates that black private college students are more likely than black public college students to have degree aspirations beyond the baccalaureate degree.

Table 2 illustrates the comparison of black public and private college students on interval variables using Analysis of Variance. Socioeconomic status is the only interval level variable which is significantly different for students attending these two types of black colleges. Socioeconomic status is a factor score which includes parents' income, educational attainment and occupation. Students who attend black private colleges appear to come from families with higher socioeconomic status level compared to students at black public institutions. This finding is consistent with most research on the socioeconomic distinction of students who attend private institutions of higher education compared to public institutions. The other variables of interest-college GPA, high school GPA, SAT scores, student satisfaction, study habits and academic integration are shown not to be significantly different for students at public or private black colleges.

Based on these comparative analyses, it appears that students at black public and private colleges are relatively

similar in terms of their academic background and behavior characteristics. In contrast, these two student groups tend to be more divergent when personal characteristics are considered. This is evident by differences in socioeconomic status, gender representation, marital status, work status, educational grants received, and degree aspiration.

The following analyses examine the predictive validity of these students' personal and academic characteristics on progression rates.

CORRELATIONS AND MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Table 3 and Table 4 show the results of zero-order correlations and regression analysis. The relationships and effects of independent student characteristic variables upon progression rate are presented in these tables. A model is illustrated for both black public and private college students. The primary objective of the regression analysis is to identify for both types of black college student significant variables which predict their academic progression. Also, comparisons of variables affecting academic progression for these two students groups are made.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficients for interval independent variables and the dependent variable are presented. The correlations provide added insight about variables which are significantly related to progression. For students at black public colleges, the strongest predictors at the bivariate level

are age (r=-.321), high school GPA (r=.300), student satisfaction (r=.206), and college GPA (r=.184) and academic integration (r=.133). Based on these correlations, it appears that black public college students who progress faster are younger, have high high-school GPA's, are relatively satisfied with their college experience, have high college GPAs, and possess high levels of academic integration. The remaining variables of interests yield relatively low and insignificant correlation coefficients.

Students who attend black private colleges have fewer significant variables that are related to their academic progression. The variables most strongly related to progression among these students appear to be college GPA (r=.214), age (r=-.312), and socioeconomic status (r=.151). Given these correlation coefficients, students at black private institutions seem to have faster progression rates if they are younger and have high college GPAs. Also, faster progressors have relatively high socioeconomic status. When comparing variables that are significantly related to progression for both of the black public and private college students, two similar predictors are identified. Age is negatively related to academic progression while there is a positive association of college GPA and the progression of students at both types of institutions. While high school GPA, student satisfaction, and academic integration are significantly related to progression at black public colleges, these variables seem not to be important at private

colleges. The socioeconomic status of students at private black colleges is related to their academic progression, whereas socioeconomic status of students at public institutions is not associated with their progression.

The independent variables in the regression model for black public college students account for 21.3% of the variance of students' progression rate, while 17.1% of the variance of black private college students is explained. The significant variables for students at the public schools are college GPA, age, and high school GPA. Students appear to progress faster if they have high college GPAs, are younger, and have high high-school GPAs. Regressing the independent variables on the progression rate for students at black private colleges reveals one significant predictor of progression. It appears that the age of students at private school affects their progression rates. Black private college students who are younger move relatively faster through their academic careers. Unlike students at black public colleges, college and high school GPAs are not important predictors for private college students.

Discussion and Conclusions

The major findings in this research provide evidence of the differences of students attending historically black colleges. In examining public and private black college students, differences are observed in terms of socioeconomic status, gender representation, marital status, work status, receiving education

grants, and degree aspiration. According to Tierney[18], most of these differences reflect general characteristics of students attending public and private institutions of higher education. Private colleges are more likely to attract students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, thus contributing significantly to a students' work status, financial aid need, and degree aspirations. It is interesting to note that academic performance variables do not vary significantly between public and private black college students. Therefore, differences of students who attend public black colleges compared to private black colleges are less evident when academic performance variables are considered compared to personal background variables.

Several important findings emerge from the comparisons of the separate regression analyses. First, age is the only variable that affects progression rate for students at both types of black colleges. Consistently across these two types of institutions, younger students have faster progression rates than older students. This finding suggests that older students at both private and public black colleges ought to be targeted with programs to improve their progression rates. Second, there are within-group differences among variables which are significant predictors of within-group academic progression. Only age affects progression for private students, but public students' progression is influenced by age in addition to college and high

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[18]Michael L. Tierney, "The Impact of Financial Aid on Student Demand for Public/Private Higher Education", **Journal of Higher Education**, Vol. 5, No. 5.

school GPAs. Most of the independent variables used in the regression analysis exert no significant effect on the rate at which students progress at black colleges. As previously mentioned, public black college students' progression is affected by two academic performance variables; high school GPA and college GPA. Generally, we would expect academic factors to have a more prominent effect on a student's academic progression. Surprisingly, this is not true for private black college students and only to a marginal degree for public black college students. Third, the regression model used in these analyses is better suited for predicting progression at black public colleges than at private colleges. Differences in the amount of variance in progression rate explained for each regression model supports this conclusion. In order to improve the predictiveness of the model, other background and academic variables that were not included should be considered in order to achieve a better fit of the model.

Due to contemporary trends and legislation, the student populations of historically black colleges are becoming more diversified. Educational researchers have to be aware of the growing variations among students enrolling at black colleges. The findings in this paper suggest that students attending historically black colleges are not a monolithic group as most research would indicate. In order to better address the quality of the college experience for these students, research is needed to identify factors which effect their experiences in higher

education. Additionally, strategies to improve the academic progression of students at historically black colleges must be informed by research which attends to differential characteristics and experiences of these students.

TABLE 1

Chi-Square Test Comparing Students at Public and Private Institutions

Independent Variables	Public		Private		Chi^2
Gender	%	n	%	n	
Female	58.0	180	72.8	112	9.03*
Male	42.0	130	27.2	42	
Work Status					
Works	75.5	232	57.5	88	14.79**
Does not work	24.5	75	42.5	65	
Degree Aspiration					
Bachelor's or less	25.7	94	14.8	24	7.055**
More than Bachelors	74.3	271	85.2	138	
Financial Aid					
Yes	67.7	211	48.2	75	15.87**
No	32.3	101	51.8	81	

*Significant at .05 level
**Significant at .01 level

TABLE 2

Black Public and Private College Student Comparison

Variables	Public Mean	SD	Private Mean	SD	F
College GPA	4.99	1.81	5.00	1.77	1.04
High School GPA	4.05	1.62	3.78	1.57	1.06
SAT Score	793.45	121.82	828.81	126.36	1.08
SES	-1.55	2.72	-0.51	3.47	1.63*
Student Satisfaction	.4748	.922	.1736	.883	1.09
Study Habits	-.275	.799	-.421	.788	1.06
Academic Integration	-1.893	5.079	-3.51	4.578	1.23

*Significant at the .05 level
**Significant at the .01 level

TABLE 3

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Regression of Students' Progression Rate on Student Characteristics At Historically Black Public Institutions

Independent Variables	B[1]	Beta[2]	t	r	N
College GPA	-.485	-.198	-2.399*	-.184**	284
Student Satisfaction	.754	.161	1.792	.206**	285
Gender	-.142	-.016	-.217		284
High-School GPA	-.547	-.190	-2.510*	-.300**	284
Age	-.549	-.246	-3.121**	-.321**	285
SAT Score	.003	.087	1.183	.059	285
Study Habits	.667	.122	1.487	-.029	285
Academic Integration	.004	.004	.045	.133*	277
Degree Aspiration	-.081	-.018	-.249		281
Work Status	-.129	-.051	-.694		283
SES	.129	.078	1.013	.089	211
Financial Aid	.281	.104	1.270		271
Constant	18.882				
F (Equation)		3.952**			
R^2		.213			

*Significant at .05 level
**Significant at .01 level

[1] Unstandardized regression coefficient
[2] Standardized regression coefficient

TABLE 4

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations and Regression of Students' Progression Rate on Student Characteristics at Historically Black Private Institutions

Independent Variables	B[1]	Beta[2]	t	r	N
College GPA	-.314	-.173	-1.556	-.214**	146
Student Satisfaction	.019	.005	.045	-.034	147
Gender	-.183	-.025	-.245		145
High-School GPA	-.112	-.055	-.505	-.101	147
Age	-.539	-.278	-2.687**	-.312**	146
SAT Score	-.002	-.063	-.618	.037	147
Study Habits	-.349	-.084	-.774	-.100	147
Academic Integration	-.003	-.004	-.032	-.028	141
Degree Aspiration	.106	.033	.322		145
Work Status	.091	.035	.340		146
SES	.079	.084	.668	.151*	121
Financial Aid	-.038	-.016	-.135		140
Constant	20.452				
F (Equation)		1.594			
R^2		.171			

*Significant at .05 level
**Significant at .01 level

[1] Unstandardized regression coefficient
[2] Standardized regression coefficient

APPENDIX A

Student Factors

Item	Correlation with Factor	Item	Correlation with Factor	Cronbach's Alpha Reliability
Student Factor 1: Academic Integration				
1. There is very little contact between professors & students outside the classroom. (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree)	0.61	6. It is easy to develop close relationships with faculty members on this campus. (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree)	-0.77	0.83
2. Most faculty members here are sensitive to the interests, needs & aspirations of students. (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree)	-0.61	7. How often have you socialized informally with a faculty member? (1 = very often, 5 = almost never)	-0.46	
3. At least one faculty member here has had a strong impact on my intellectual development. (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree)	-0.45	8. How often have you discussed career plans and ambitions with a faculty member? (1 = very often, 5 = almost never)	-0.48	
4. Faculty members here are good teachers. (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree)	-0.48	9. How often have you discussed personal problems and concerns with a faculty member? (1 = very often, 5 = almost never)	-0.46	
5. If a student seems to be doing poorly, this university goes out of its way to help the student stay in school (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree)	-0.52	10. Are you satisfied with the faculty-student relations? (1 = very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied)	-0.71	

APPENDIX A (Continued)

Item	Correlation with Factor	Item	Correlation with Factor	Cronbach's Alpha Reliability
Student Factor 3: Student Satisfaction				
1. Are you satisfied with the student housing at your university? (1 = very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied)	-0.43	5. Are you satisfied with the student employment services at your university? (1 = very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied)	-0.40	0.74
2. Are you satisfied with your university's academic reputation? (1 = very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied)	-0.58	6. Are you satisfied with the student organizations at your university? (1 = very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied)	-0.42	
3. Are you satisfied with the quality of classroom instruction at your university? (1 = very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied)	-0.42	7. Are you satisfied with the administration at your university? (1 = very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied)	-0.49	
4. Are you satisfied with the variety of courses offered at your university? (1 = very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied)	-0.58	8. Are you satisfied with the libraries, learning centers, etc., at your university? (1 = very satisfied, 5 = very dissatisfied)	-0.58	
Student Factor 6: Study Habits				
1. I see to it that my schoolwork is carefully planned and organized. (1 = almost always, 5 = rarely)	0.62	3. I keep my assignments up to date. (1 = almost always, 5 = rarely)	0.57	0.66
2. Unless I really like a course I don't work as I should. (1 = almost always, 5 = rarely)	0.49			
Student Factor 7: Socioeconomic Status (SES)				
1. Parents' education	0.71			0.85
2. Parents' income	0.73			
3. Parents' occupation	0.86			